

# Sub Group on InterCulturalism and Racism

## FINAL REPORT April 2010

### 1. MEMBERSHIP:

Barbara Sheridan (Crushan Munia), Caroline Coleman (Southern Regional College), Colette Murray (Pavee Point), Deirdre Devlin (WELB), Frank O'Hagan (Belfast City Council), Israel Hontavilla (Belong), Jacqui Reid (Ulster Teachers Union), Kathleen Sheridan (Crushan Munia), Kellie O'Dowd (Trademark), Kieran Shields (SELB – Sub Group Chair), Mark Donahue (An Munia Tober), Martin Sloan (Belfast Health & Social Care Trust), Pascal McCulla (OFMDFM), Paddy Mongan (An Munia Tober), Shuyb Miah (Inclusion & Diversity Service) Victoria Goodfellow (Department of Education).

The Sub Group held a series of working meetings in Newry and Belfast (minutes are available on the DE web pages at [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/18\\_pupils\\_parents-travellers\\_pg/taskforce\\_on\\_traveller\\_education.html](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/18_pupils_parents-travellers_pg/taskforce_on_traveller_education.html)). The Sub Group Chair also travelled to Coalisland and Pavee Point in Dublin to meet Traveller parents, young adults and individual Travellers whose views and perspectives have been included in this draft report. A note of those meetings has been included as Appendix 1. The Chair would like to thank Pavee Point, Coalisland Training Services, Newry Teachers Centre, An Munia Tober and Ulster Teachers Union for hosting those meetings. Also thanks to all of the Sub Group members who gave of their time, expertise and hospitality to ensure this work was completed.

### 2. FINDINGS:

The Sub Group discussed a range of topics in the field of culture, inter-culturalism, racism and the support for Traveller children's cultural identity within education. The broad findings are listed below as a series of points which have been recorded during the discussions and have not been placed in any particular order by the Sub Group. The notes on 'culture' have been drawn from a range of sources including the parents and Travellers who attended the Sub Group meetings and local dialogues. This section is included only as a synopsis of key cultural issues facing the Traveller community and is not meant to be taken as a definitive statement on Traveller culture heritage. There are some references for further reading included as Appendix 2 which have more in-depth information.

#### *Culture*

Culture can be defined as a collection of customs, rules and patterns of behaviour which have been developed by and shared by a group of people to give meaning to their social and material life. There will be various aspects of any culture which are shared in common with the majority of members of any community and some elements which members do not adhere to or believe in. This does not mean that they are not part of the culture but it does highlight the breadth of the concepts and norms which make up any community. Travellers are one of the oldest ethnic minority communities in Ireland with a rich and varied cultural heritage going back centuries. The Traveller

community has a strong and vibrant culture based around the centrality of the family, their extended family and the nomadic tradition of travelling for social and economic purposes. ***“Being a Traveller is the feeling of belonging to a group of people. Knowing through thick and thin they are there for you, having the support of family systems. Having an identity.”***

(Michael McDonough, Traveller Voices, <http://www.paveepoint.ie/voices2.html>).

Over the centuries Travellers have been viewed by the wider community both positively through folk imagery associated with their trades, crafts and storytelling traditions as well as negatively regarding their independent living which has been characterised as ‘separation’ and ‘difference’. Travellers have faced a long history of exclusion, discrimination and negative perceptions from the settled majority which continues to be a blight on both communities as each new generation attends school for the first time. The sedentary nature of the majority culture informs how education is delivered including the timing of each school year and how education is delivered within a formal structured system. The system is very formalised and structured and can view Travellers who want to have a bit more flexibility as a community who are difficult to accommodate. As a minority community (less than one per cent of the population) Travellers have always faced the threat of being subsumed or assimilated into the majority culture. This threat of cultural disappearance usually results in a strongly inward-looking and self-regulating response in order to protect its own cultural identity and strengthen its internal bonds in the face of external pressure to drop its culture and conform to the ways of the majority. Travellers have a strong oral tradition which keeps alive the memory of its cultural traditions and past generations through story-telling, songs, family names and distinct cultural practices. Travellers retain a strong attachment to nomadic travelling and a minority of Travellers still travel for economic and cultural reasons such as following seasonal employment opportunities and visiting relatives in different regions. Even though most families do not live in caravans or sites, there is a strong belief in the ‘right to travel’ and Travellers will not disrespect other families who continue to live in temporary or mobile accommodation.

### ***Inter-Culturalism***

The Sub Group recognised that there are a number of pieces of work which need to be undertaken in an effort to improve the understanding and respect for the Traveller community and to reduce the levels of racism and discrimination Travellers face in their everyday lives. Firstly there is the work that needs to happen at school level with teachers, pupils and parents in a joint effort to promote positive acceptance of the Traveller community and a valuing of their cultural heritage throughout the curriculum. Schools need to understand and respond to the Traveller world view which is different from rather than opposed to the sedentary culture of the wider community. The fear of widespread assimilation and cultural loss was mentioned in every consultation with Traveller parents and those young adults who have just finished their school lives. Schools may think by asking Travellers to take part in mainstream and after school activities which concentrate on the majority culture that they are being inclusive and welcoming. The use of ‘settled’ education materials and after school services can be seen by Travellers as an attempt to assimilate them into the majority culture and to remove their Traveller identity. Travellers who are perceived to have withdrawn or are disinterested in education may well be distancing themselves from the school and the education process because of their genuine fears for the cultural integrity of their children and their wider Traveller community. An education system which understands respects and values the Traveller culture and its rich heritage will help Traveller parents and children to feel welcome at school and to

be part of the school community without having to reduce or deny Traveller identity. When teachers and school managers understand this cultural dilemma they will be in a better position to provide culturally appropriate support which helps Travellers develop a pride in their culture and to become confident and competent in expressing their sense of belonging both to school and family.

The second key strand of inter-cultural work focuses on the needs of Traveller parents in helping them to use the education system to their own and their children's advantage. In developing their knowledge and confidence Traveller parents will be in a better position to ask for additional educational support services which are sensitive to their beliefs and cultural practices. Through increased knowledge of how education works, what is involved in the curriculum and what additional support services are on offer to all children. Traveller parents will communicate with and participate more in the life of their schools in a way in which benefits both the parent and the school. The Sub Group has summarised these learning points into a series of recommendations for inter-cultural education and development (see Part 3 below).

## ***Racism***

In everyday language racism is taken to mean racial discrimination or abuse based on skin colour and/or physical appearance. However there are other elements which are equally racist when culture, language or religions are used as the markers of difference. For the purpose of clarity, schools in Northern Ireland are advised to define as a racist incident any ***“Behaviour or language that makes a pupil feel unwelcome or marginalised because of their colour, ethnicity, culture, religion or national origin”***. It has been highlighted by Prof. Paul Connolly<sup>1</sup>, Dr Neil Jarman<sup>2</sup> and the Commission for Racial Equality<sup>3</sup> that racism directed at Travellers continues to be regarded as 'acceptable' in many quarters and that it is a significant factor affecting the lives and life-chances of children and young people who are targeted by it.

***“Gypsies and Travellers are still experiencing discrimination of the most overt kind: discrimination against these groups remains the last ‘respectable’ form of racism in the UK”***. Legal Action Group (2004).

For example, in the 2008 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey<sup>2</sup>, just 41% of respondents said they were willing to accept a Traveller as a near resident. Traveller children regularly report incidences of racist language and behaviour directed at them by other children and adults including insulting language, social exclusion and bullying which is clearly a consequence of their Traveller identity. A further negative consequence is that the task of winning the trust of Traveller parents and children is made all the more difficult and sensitive due to the continuation of these behaviours and attitudes among the majority community. Racism including discrimination or bullying due to race, faith or culture is illegal and individuals and such activity is covered by a range of laws and government policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Connolly, P. and Keenan, M. (2000) *Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland* (Report 1). Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

<sup>2</sup> Jarman, N (2009) ARK Research Report No.69, November 2009, Economic and Social Research Council. Available At: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update63.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Commission for Racial Equality (2006) *Common Ground: Equality, good relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers*. CRE: London.

There are two key pieces of legislation which address racism and discrimination firstly The Race Relations Order (NI) 1997 and secondly The Criminal Justice (No2) (NI) Order 2004 (Hate Crime Legislation). There are also general equality, right and social inclusion protections contained with the equality legislation such as Section 75 of the NI Act (1998). For schools the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 places specific duties upon the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school *“To safeguard and promote the welfare of registered pupils at all times when the pupils are at school or in the control or charge of a member of school staff”* (Article 17). Bullying and/or harassment experienced may also constitute an offence under the criminal law - Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997.

There is clear guidance to schools and other educational institutions that they have a duty to protect all children and young people from racism and racist bullying and that they must provide adequate training, advice and support to their staff, governors and any volunteers who come into contact with children to help protect children from any form of abuse. In 2001 the Department of Education (DE) issued guidance - ‘Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour’. The guidance offers practical advice and outlines the importance of all young people, from whatever background, having the right to be valued and respected, to be educated in a secure and caring environment, and to have their abilities and talents nurtured and developed to their full potential. The Department of Education (DE) is also issuing a new circular to replace Circular 1993/37 on ‘Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Traveller Families’. This new Circular will further provide support and guidance for schools to ensure measures are taken to overcome obstacles to access schooling and to promote equality of opportunity for all Traveller children.

### **3. PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Sub Group on Inter-Culturalism and Racism accepted the need for both generic equality awareness and anti-racist work to be developed by schools but also more Traveller-specific curriculum content, staff training and school development planning. The need for all children to be assisted in this work was highlighted particularly by Traveller parents, insisting that *“Traveller children should not be picked on to talk about racism or the Traveller culture, it should be part of every year in the school and all cultures talked about equally”* (Traveller parent – Coalisland). As Connolly and Keenan recommended in their 2000 Study there is ... ***“The need for schools to adopt an 'intercultural' approach - that encourages children and schools to explore and address the issue of racism much more explicitly while also increasing awareness of and respect for cultural diversity”***.

The discussions by the Sub Group and the consultations with parents produced the following set of proposed recommendations for work around inter-culturalism and racism:

1. Education and Library Boards should develop through their Curriculum Advisers an enhanced version of the “Mutual Understanding” part of the curriculum to reflect Traveller culture and heritage (this is being piloted at present through the Together 4 All project).

2. A guidance note should be published by the Education and Skills Authority for all newly qualified teachers on the Traveller cultures including references for further reading, sources of advice and guidance, where training can be obtained and a set of live links to Traveller support websites.

3. Board officers and specialist school staff should be trained to deliver the enhanced element of the curriculum and diversity awareness training to school-based staff. A DVD of how to undertake inter-cultural work should be made available to schools and available as a download from the appropriate websites.

4. Board officers and employing authorities should provide a Traveller-specific element to their induction training for all non-teaching staff including bus drivers, canteen staff, cleaners, caretakers and after school workers.

5. A second level of training should be provided to Senior Management Teams, Boards of Governors and Heads of Service for public bodies on how to tackle racism, how to raise expectations of Traveller participation and how to promote the inclusion of Traveller parents including their participation in voluntary roles such as Governors and Parent/School Associations.

6. Schools should be advised of the availability and willingness of Traveller trainers to visit their school and provide a Traveller-specific element to their inter-cultural work both with staff and pupils.

7. All schools should review their anti-bullying work using a whole school approach with input from staff, pupils and parents working together to tackle all forms of bullying and to improve the culture of reporting. The use of older Traveller pupils as 'peer mentors' or 'buddies' should be encouraged and supported as standard practice.

8. Schools should use the Inclusion and Diversity Service's 'Toolkit for Diversity' as a means of developing and sustaining their inter-cultural work beginning with an audit of current practice within the school. School leaders are recommended to include the following key learning points in developing their inter-cultural work:

- Create a positive and welcoming ethos within the school
- Ensure good communication with parents
- Use positive images and role models from minority ethnic communities
- Develop inter-cultural learning across the whole school
- Celebrate racial and ethnic diversity with all pupils
- Raise awareness of world faiths and festivals
- Use inclusive teaching strategies
- Include in your school development plan work on anti-racist bullying
- Contact a Board Officer for sources of training, advice and guidance.

9. As part of the preparation for the delivery of Intercultural work schools should invite Traveller pupils and their families to discuss their views on such work and to encourage their participation. Traveller parents should also be consulted as to the manner in which this information

presented. e.g. do they wish or to have the Traveller information provided in the context of all cultures in Ireland without having their children mentioned specifically.

10. Education and Library Boards should provide up to date and accurate advice to schools via training seminars, awareness-raising events, e-learning including web-based learning, video conferencing and bulletin boards.

11. As an integral part of the school ethos, schools should seek to include Traveller parents in their school outreach work to improve Travellers' sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It would be difficult to develop a better agenda for action than the set of outcomes which Traveller parents in Dublin outlined to Dublin City University at their Traveller education planning day in March 2004. These are a set of simple but profound wishes:

##### **What do you hope for your child from school?**

- To learn to read and write
- To develop skills
- To become mature
- To develop confidence in themselves
- To be able to talk and do for themselves
- To have choices, to marry, to progress to go wherever they want
- To begin to have dreams and to make those dreams come true
- To have the freedom to make informed choices
- To feel valued as members of society
- To reach their own potential
- To get on well with staff
- To leave school with a positive outlook
- To not experience any form of discrimination
- To go through all stages including 3rd level
- To get a good education with access to employment
- To be treated equally and enjoy themselves
- To be happy, holding on to their identity
- That they would be proud of their identity
- To learn to mix with children from other backgrounds
- To help children look at all their options at each stage of learning

## **Appendix 1 - Feedback from meetings with Travellers on Inter-Culturalism and Racism**

### **Pavee Point Meeting**

Thanks are due to Michael, Thomas, Nancy, John, Kathleen, Paddy as well as Colette in Pavee Point for their thoughts and consideration:

- Travellers indicated strong support for the Traveller culture to be included in the social education/mutual understanding part of the curriculum in small doses from nursery school upwards. Discussions should start early in nursery school and continue right through to secondary schools;
- There should also be room for some external facilitation, including from Travellers, from Year 7 onwards, without forcing the Traveller pupils to take part in their own class or school or asking parents to come to their child's school or local area;
- Traveller pupils should be advised and supported before the material is covered so that they are not embarrassed and have the choice to opt out if they wish;
- Follow up work should put the knowledge learned into the rest of the curriculum and in the context of other cultures living side by side in Ireland;
- Teachers should learn enough about the Traveller culture to be able to deliver positive messages about a strong, vibrant and long-standing traditional community;
- Teachers do not need to know every single thing about Travellers but they need to learn how to respect Traveller children and encourage respect in others;
- The fact that some Travellers do not follow every single Traveller cultural practice does not mean that they do not respect these practices and accept them as part of the wider Traveller culture;
- Some Traveller children need to develop their own cultural knowledge and skills to help them be confident, to respect themselves, other Travellers and other cultures;
- There needs to be a wider range of culturally appropriate books, toys, jigsaws and other learning resources including books and magazines for older children;
- Teachers need to learn to raise their expectations of Traveller children and not to accept them missing class or doing different work to their settled peers;
- More positive role models and examples of Travellers being 'pupil of the week', gold star in the book or winning medals at school need to be recognised and celebrated more regularly.

Parents have a key role in showing leadership, building their child's confidence and being proud to be a strong and independent Traveller.

## Coalisland Meeting

Thanks are due to Thomas, Margaret, Kathleen, Brigid, Noreen, Caroline, Mary and Maria as well as Jim, Karen and Val in the SELB for their input and assistance:

- Travellers supported the idea of more cultural awareness for teachers and pupils but highlighted that this could be embarrassing for some Traveller pupils if they are not asked about it in advance;
- Some Traveller parents were willing to provide information about the Traveller culture to schools but not in their home area or in schools where their families attend;
- The breadth of Travellers' culture and lives need to be explored rather than using stereotypes such as the site or the trailer when many young Travellers will have no experience of living on a site;
- Schools need to be aware that being left out of activities or left at the back of the class to follow different work from all the other pupils is a form of exclusion and should be stopped;
- A resource centre with an exhibition of Traveller culture and history should be developed in the Coalisland area as it is central to most of Northern Ireland. This would be something positive for Travellers to get involved in and for all school pupils to visit, not just Travellers;
- More investment is needed in the type of training and preparation for Traveller work that meets the needs of local Traveller children and young people while they are still at school;
- Traveller parents agreed that some mixing with non-Travellers would be beneficial for the younger children but it might not be appropriate for the teenagers. Although there is a role for Traveller single identity work, most parents wanted to see integrated services for all children including Travellers;
- There was strong support for further investment in a range of integrated early years' services including childcare;
- Some parents also indicated the need for Travellers themselves to receive training and education around equality and diversity as some of the language such as 'handicapped' might be out of date and negative. There are Traveller trainers in other areas who could help deliver this equality awareness training;
- Travellers wanted the opportunity to volunteer as mentors or education assistants in community-based or school-based education projects through support programmes such as Belong, Transforming Learning Communities or Safe & Well. Again the problem of working close to home with your own or neighbour's children was brought up as a potential barrier. Some parents were willing to travel to other areas if support was provided;

Parents thanked the SELB team for taking their comments on board and agreeing to pass on the comments to the Traveller Task Force.

## Appendix 2

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Travellers Making Connexions: a Good Practice Guide for Multi-Agency Work Available at: [http://www.connexions-cd.org.uk/pdf/Travellers\\_making\\_Cxs.pdf](http://www.connexions-cd.org.uk/pdf/Travellers_making_Cxs.pdf).